

NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW WITH DR ATUL TANEJA

Phototherapy is one of the safest methods of treatment for a variety of skin conditions and has recently become popular in India. Modern phototherapy was invented at the famous Harvard Medical School, USA, which has the best medical Institutes in the world. Dr. Atul Taneja has worked at this Institute in Boston, USA, with the topmost researchers and has himself major contributions in developing several machines like the 1st laser in the world for vitiligo (leukoderma) , the 1st laser for psoriasis, the 1st machine for psoriasis of the scalp, the 1st phototherapy for lichen-planus, etc.. His projects were one of the 1st to introduce the concept of targeted phototherapy. All this work is available on the internet. He is the only dermatologist in India to hold clinical super-specialization degrees and that too in 3 subjects of Laser Surgery, Photo-medicine and Skin Oncology. In this interview we ask him about phototherapy treatments which are used all around the world using some of his own techniques.

1) WHAT IS PHOTOTHERAPY?

Phototherapy is the treatment of a variety of medical conditions using special lights. There are 2 main kinds of Photo therapies. The most popular is called narrow-band phototherapy and the other is called PUVA (psoralen +UVA).

2) ARE THERE OTHER MACHINES WHICH USE LIGHTS FOR TREATMENT?

Yes, many other machines called lasers were invented in our department and are mostly for cosmetic indications. These powerful machines can target specific structures below the skin. Thus, permanent hair removal, tattoo removal, birth-mark removal, scar removal, wrinkle removal, acne treatment can painlessly and safely be performed in just a few minutes. This theory was invented by our colleague Prof. Rox Anderson. The same theory is actually used in all other medical lasers whether used for the eye, stones, prostate, heart etc.

3) FOR WHICH MEDICAL CONDITIONS IS PHOTOTHERAPY USED?

Phototherapy is used for a variety of skin conditions like vitiligo, psoriasis, eczemas and many other skin conditions. Phototherapy is also used to treat some kinds of skin cancers and is helpful in producing vitamin D which is deficient in most Indians.

4) HOW IS PHOTOTHERAPY TREATMENT GIVEN?

Phototherapy is given in special units which contain special lamps. Light from these lamps is shown on affected areas of the skin for a selected amount of time determined by the doctor. The treatment is just for a few minutes and the patient does not feel anything. This treatment needs to be repeated 2-3 times per week till the skin condition is healed.

5) HOW SAFE IS PHOTOTHERAPY

The light in phototherapy machines is NOT radiation and is extremely safe. Even small children and pregnant ladies can undergo phototherapy.

6) WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS?

Phototherapy is extremely safe. The main precaution is to protect your eyes with goggles during treatment. Some patients may notice mild redness of their white patches for a few hours after treatment. Other side effects are not seen on Indian skin.

7) IS PHOTOTHERAPY BETTER THAN MEDICINAL TREATMENT?

Phototherapy has the advantage of avoiding side effects of medicines. Some medical conditions like vitiligo or psoriasis require long term treatment. Many of the medicines for these conditions pass through the blood, liver and kidneys and these medicines have to be

continued for a long time. With phototherapy, there are no such side effects and the patient can be kept under control just with these special lights.

8) ARE THESE TREATMENTS AVAILABLE IN INDIA? ARE THEY RELIABLE?

Yes, many centers in India have these facilities now and openly advertise in the media. Unfortunately, many companies sell inferior machines which have flooded many centers in our country. Another problem is lack of regulation on who operates or supervises treatment. In the USA, only those dermatologists who have super-specialized in these subjects and who understand the science behind these machines are employed by hospitals. Because of this lack of standards in India, patients face problems like lack of improvement and side-effects.